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SUBJECT: Rwanda/Burundi - Background and Current Issues

RWANDA

There's good news and bad news from Rwanda. The good news is that the government has been in power now for 13 months, and is stabilizing. The government, however, has not made as much progress as hoped on its commitment to reconciliation and truly build a representative government. Moderate Hutus in government are marginalized. For instance only four out of 20 Directors General named recently are Hutu.

The bad news is that raids from Hutu exiles continue, and the Rwandan government's patience is wearing thin. There are indications that the exiles may be planning a bigger attack in the next couple of months, perhaps in an attempt to grab a slice of territory to force the government to accept them at any future negotiating table and revive the Arusha Agreement. Vice-President and Defense Minister Paul Kagame, the power behind the throne, has warned that Rwanda expects the international community to resolve this situation. The Rwandan Army appears capable of repulsing any attack from the former regime's army, the ex-FAR.

A military response by the Rwandan army would put hundreds of thousands of refugees on the border in harm's way. We are pressuring UNHCR and the Zairian government to move the refugees deeper into Zaire. We are also cautioning Kagame against hasty action, and demarching Zaire regarding the need for them to police this corner of their country better.

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The USG, other governments, and the human rights community are directing attention to Rwanda's prisons. There are 50,000+ prisoners, nearly all Hutu. Some are minors or elderly. They have, on average, about a square meter of living space. We are urging the Government to take several steps to alleviate overcrowding, including amnesty for non-ringleaders.

There should be a Security Council vote soon on Rwanda's request to lift the arms embargo. The Administration supports the request, subject to several conditions aimed at preventing the misuse of the arms, or their transfer to other parties in the sub-region. Our draft includes preambular language expressing concern over the prison situation. Some countries, and some NGOs, would like to see more explicit linkage between the arms embargo lift and improvement of prison conditions.

BURUNDI

The security situation in Burundi remains about the same, i.e., some nights pass peacefully, while others produce dozens of dead. A typical pattern is an attack by Hutu extremists, followed by reprisal raids by the military. The number of internally displaced persons has risen significantly due to these operations, now totalling 300,000. Armed Tutsi Militias continue their attacks on Hutus. There are reports of armed Rwandan Hutu exiles in the north of Burundi, near the border with Zaire and Rwanda. They pass freely through a corridor paralleling the Rwanda/Burundi frontier, linking up with Hutus in exile in Tanzania.

Nor is the internal political situation in Burundi particularly stable. The Hutu President continues to weaken, while Hutu extremists become stronger, given the military response to Hutu raids. A recent call by the OAU for an all-party Burundi political conference in Addis Ababa was rejected by almost all of Bujumbura's leading politicians.

There is a growing consensus that an international regional political conference of the Great Lakes parties should take place. This is in addition to a series of preventive diplomacy initiatives on our part, ranging from demonstrating support for the government and moderates through public and diplomatic attention to their efforts to actions such as several meetings with VOA regarding reconciliation broadcasts for the sub-region.

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There should be a Security Council vote soon on creation of a Commission of Inquiry into Burundian violence since October, 1993. The Security Council is likely to approve the idea, though there is a divergence of views on what it should look like. We, Germany and others support a strong Commission, while the NAM may not support strong terms of reference.

Next steps: Dick Bogosian will be discussing all of the issues confronting us in these two countries with France and Belgium, in an effort to come up with a joint plan of action. He will soon make a swing through Europe and East Africa to consult with other key players.

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